

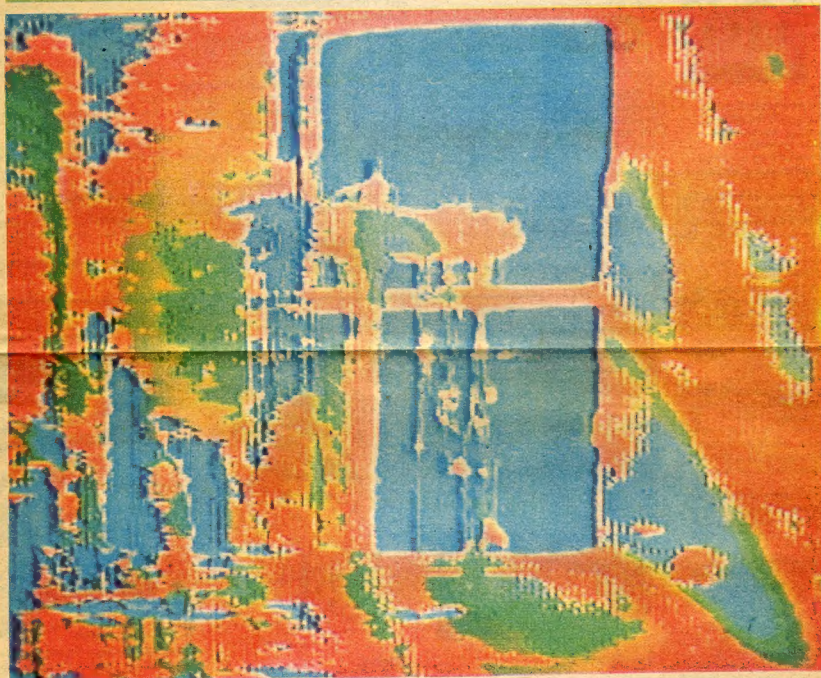
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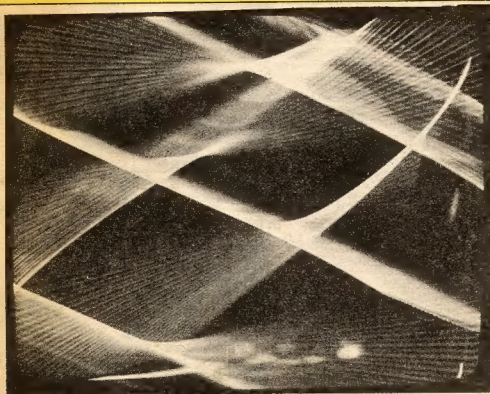
COVER STORY



Joe D'Agostino, above left, is an artist-in-residence at the Experimental Television Center in Owego. Seated with him at a control board is Hank Rudolph, program coordinator for the center. D'Agostino, from Philadelphia, uses bongo drums and an audiosynthesizer to create some of his work. At right, David Jones (foreground), the system designer at the center, and D'Agostino film some figurines for a video.



PHOTOS BY KEITH HITCHENS



VIDEO OWEGO

The Experimental Television Center teaches video artists how

By MARY ERHARD

In Owego, on Front Street above the Hand of Man gift shop, there is a studio where visitors tread the hardwood floors, sleep over for days at a time, and try to make something out of the crazy patterns on the television screen.

It is the Experimental Television Center, housed in a roomy third-floor loft with exposed-brick walls and a view of the Susquehanna River. Visitors, called artists in residence, come here to make videotapes that are pieces of art.

"We're not as much a production house as we are a place to learn things," said director Ralph Hocking.

The center is a place where people interested in video as an art form may experiment with equipment to create art. According to an informational booklet put together by Sherry Miller Hocking, assistant director of the center, the artists use light in a manner analogous to a painter's use of pigment.

The studio has a number of used image-processing machines, among them color monitors, recorders, black and white and color cameras, and various machines with names like color special effects generator, sequencers, colorizers, controllers and frame buffers.

Rather than produce the videotape themselves, the center's minimal staff shows the artists how to use the equipment to experiment with the possibilities the machines offer and eventually create the effects they desire.

And the effects can be bizarre. An unidentifiable pattern on one television screen with vibrant and pulsing colors was

explained by free-lance systems consultant David Jones:

The seemingly random pattern had begun as a picture of the studio room itself, with a window and plant in the background. Jones passed his hand in front of the TV camera, and made adjustments to control panel knobs. The result was that the monitor retained more than one frame, and showed the sequence of the passage of the hand, giving it a smeared rather than crisp appearance.

With a few more adjustments to the knobs and a few more passes, the image on the monitor became less identifiable. Jones added different colors at one point and at another, caused certain of them to pulsate.

The key to all this is flexibility, Jones said. The machines should have many different capabilities to give the artists a wide range of possibilities, he said.

One way this is done is by programming. The functions of all control panel knobs are programmable, he said. "We have a control panel that can be changed according to our whims. What we're trying to do here is to present an assortment of equipment . . . that can produce an assortment of effects."

According to Hocking's booklet, the system is both an image generator and an image processor. It provides control over specific visual and auditory elements of composition as well as a variety of techniques, including mixing, sequencing, and others. The computer software was designed to be easy to use by the artists, who need to learn the capabilities of the system in a short time.

"Some people are interested for example in a narrative," she said. "Other people are . . . interested in abstract images."

The artists are primarily from New York state, but have come from as far afield as Norway.

The informality among the three staff members, one artist from Philadelphia, and free-lancer Jones was reminiscent of the jeans-and-pigtails days of the late 1960s. The equipment seemed lost in a large space, occupying perhaps one-third of the studio. People were dressed in various combinations of T-shirts, blue jeans, and other casual shirts and pants. And the achievement-oriented, time-conscious attitude prevalent in the 9-to-5 working world was conspicuously absent.

Recent artist-in-residence Joseph (Joe) D'Agostino, who brought two sets of bongo drums and an audiosynthesizer to use in his videotape, was sleeping in the studio for several nights until he returned to his home city. When asked what he does for a living, he said, "Do?"

First responding that he moved in the non-broadcast video community, he finally settled on free-lance video production person.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," he said about the subject of or shape his videotape would take. "I'm just going to play."

He also didn't intend to do anything in particular with the tape once it was made, he added, except add it to his growing video oeuvre.

Along with Ralph and Sherry Hocking (Jones as a free-lancer is not a staff member), the third member of the staff is Hank

Rudolph, the part-time programs coordinator. While Jones designs machines to do the job, Rudolph walks the artists through what they need to know.

According to the informational booklet, the center was founded in 1971 as the Community Center for Television Production, an outgrowth of the Student Experiments in Television program begun by Ralph Hocking in 1969 at the state University Center at Binghamton. Hocking is a professor in SUNY's cinema department.

As demand increased and the fledgling center was encouraged by the New York State Council on the Arts, it was incorporated and moved to downtown Binghamton. The center began to take on its current shape there, as a research and development program was begun to accommodate artists interested in investigating the use of video as art.

The center now has an operating budget of about \$40,000 a year, said Sherry Hocking. The state arts council provides \$31,000 of this, and about \$9,000 comes from the National Endowment for the Arts.

However, about \$45,000 is passed through the center in the form of grants to artists. Because a state arts council grant must be made to corporations rather than individuals, the center applies in the artists' names, and passes on the amount allotted for the artists' use. The center keeps about two percent of the grant for administrative purposes, Sherry Hocking said.

About 60 artists visit per year. They are asked to pay \$5 per day to use the facilities. In addition, the center asks that the artists leave a copy of the videotapes they make for the center's library.

Erhard is a staff writer for the Press & Sun-Bulletin.